Interview with Jack Barbash

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Labor Series

PROFESSOR JACK BARBASH

Interviewer: Morris Weisz

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Q: This is Morris Weisz and this is the first side of the first tape of my interview with my old friend Jack Barbash in Madison, Wisconsin, on May 2 [and 3], 1994. Jack has had extensive experience in a number of fields that are very relevant to our Labor Diplomacy Oral History Project and we will append biographical and bibliographical material to the interview when it is finally transcribed, but in the meanwhile, let me just say that on the domestic front Jack was active in the trade union movement before he entered Federal Government service in 1939. Prior to that, he had been employed in the State Government of New York and spent a number of years in the Federal Government before again going to work for one of the trade unions. He had worked for the trade unions in New York, and in Chicago in 1948-1950, where he was Education Director of the Amalgamated Meatcutters Union for a couple of years before returning to Washington and Government work with the United States Senate. Ultimately he ended up at the C.I.O. and in 1957 in a big change in his occupation he entered academe on a regular basis. Before 1957, he had been teaching occasionally in various schools and especially at the Workers School at the University of Wisconsin. As a result in 1957 the University of Wisconsin offered him a position and ever since then he has been associated with that university. The combination of teaching experience in workers' schools, both while he was working for trade unions and

doing extension work, and his work as a teacher led to his interest in international affairs. Beginning with the mid-1950s, I would say, he became a regular among the academics interested in international affairs. In that connection he later visited over 50 countries, usually lecturing for the USIA or the embassy or some cooperating local organization. He traveled extensively and for the purposes of our project I am interested in interviewing him on a number of subjects related to two areas. One, any comments he may have as to the labor officer function in the various government agencies under whose auspices — or even independently — he lectured abroad and secondly, some topics that I have listed that he will have some comments on — I hope extensive comments on — which are related to international labor.

Now, I am going to stop this, and we'll put Jack on with some questions I'll be raising. Well, Jack, suppose we begin. Possibly you might want to correct some of the aspects of your background that I described if you wish at this point.

BARBASH: Well, my one minute biography divides my career, like all Gaul, into three parts. I have been a trade union economist, a government civil servant, and for 37 years or so a professor, but in certain senses all of these roles interacted, because I was teaching when I was a trade unionist and so although I had different job titles, as I look back, there's a remarkable consistency in what I was doing and what I was interested in. I got into trade unions quite naturally, without conscious choice. I grew up in a trade union household. My father was a Jewish immigrant from Russia, who was deeply interested in social affairs and was himself active on the East Side [of New York City] in some of the intellectual activities like the Educational Alliance, where he was a kind of a manager. The Educational Alliance was physically close by the Jewish Daily Forward, so he was very much a part of that milieu without himself being an active intellectual participant, which he was not. He was a working man, and his career was that of a manager of small time movie houses, which were then breaking through. He had come to the country at the end of the 19th Century, in the 1890s, and moved naturally to the East Side, and then to East New York, to the Brownsville section of Brooklyn, which was almost as great a

hotbed of intellectual, Yiddish-socialist activity. I grew up naturally, you might say, within the socialists in the trade union movement. I went to college at New York University and very soon afterwards began teaching classes for various unions around the city and in the metropolitan area.

Q: You refer to yourself as having worked as an economist for the trade unions and you did have your degree in economics, but it was more than just being an economist for the unions. You actually did much more than that.

BARBASH: Oh, yes. I did much more than that, but my primary job was as an economist and I would say as a teacher. If I go into details, my first job, if it was a job, was on the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and it was on the WPA's Workers Education Program, which was a program to teach classes and write memoranda for trade unions. It was a cooperative program where many of the people later active as union educational directors and research directors served their apprenticeship for such unions as the Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. By the time I was in my very early 20s, maybe even late teens, I was doing work for unions by way of volunteer organizing, so I grew up in such an environment. The difference, I suppose, between me and other people was that I pursued it in what would then be a rigorous fashion intellectually, as I took courses in it, began to write very early about it, and so evolved into the trade union movement without any conscious choice of occupation or profession.

Q: From the WPA projects, which I had forgotten about. . . That actually was your first employment, although I should remind you that many times you used to refer to your first employment as selling food up and down the aisles in your father's movie theaters. That was employment also.

BARBASH: Yes, it was. I served as an usher in movie houses. Because of my father and my job, I worked my way through college serving as an usher and assistant manager in small movie houses. I rose to the rank of corporal in Loew's-State, as my father happened

to know Marcus Loew from their immigrant beginnings. They were roughly of the same age and he got me a job there, where at the pinnacle of my career as usher in Loew's-State, I became a corporal, wearing a uniform, in the first balcony, where I had charge over other ushers. I did not stay there very long.

Q: It was a leadership function.

BARBASH: That's right.

Q: From the WPA, you went to work for a union full time, did you?

BARBASH: From the WPA, I went to work for unions. I did part time teaching for the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union in the New York metropolitan area at the rate of five dollars a day and ferry expenses, because I worked all over in the metropolitan area. I got to know what the I.L.G. called the “out of town staff” very closely. They were good friends and that period was extremely valuable in getting me right in to the nitty-gritty of organizing, of holding a union together, of running classes for stewards, of getting into the nitty-gritty of union administration at the local level at a time when the union was just starting out.

Q: This would have been 1932 or so?

BARBASH: This would have been even earlier than 1932, because I was still an undergraduate. I remember a Maiden Form local in Paterson and Elizabeth, New Jersey, where I did a good deal of work and made many friends that lasted a life time.

Q: Before we go further on this, in connection with your school activities, did you get involved into politics?

BARBASH: I got involved into socialist politics. I was recruited into “Yipsel” [Young People's Socialist League, the youth group of the Socialist Party, headed by Norman Thomas] in high school by two fellows from my area who became close friends, Harold

Luxemburg and George Novak. Luxemburg later became a fairly prosperous labor lawyer and Novak became a labor editor.

Q: In that connection, did you at any time in this period or later run for office?

BARBASH: I ran for office as a socialist. I ran for state office...

Q: In Brooklyn?

BARBASH: I ran in Brooklyn, if my recollection serves me right, because we are now talking close to sixty years ago and I ran in the upper West Side because they needed a fill-in candidate for the state senate.

Q: The upper West Side of New York?

BARBASH: Of New York City, of Manhattan.

Q: So you were actually active in street corner speaking.

BARBASH: Yes, I was active in street corner speeches and for anyone who wants to look at the archives, The New Leader#and The Socialist Call used to run lists of corner speeches and my name frequently appeared in these corner speeches. I knew how to make a street corner speech.

Q: To continue with your jobs, there was the WPA and your early trade union activity, if you don't consider the W.P.A. as a regular job, since it was. . .

BARBASH: It was a regular job.

Q: It was a regular job in the sense that you were getting paid regularly, but they looked upon that as make-work. . .

BARBASH: As make-work.

Q: . . . even though people worked hard at it.

BARBASH: People worked hard, yes. My first WPA job was to teach public speaking to people who were applying for jobs at the 92nd Street Y.M.H.A., where they ran an employment agency. While they were waiting, I ran a course in public speaking and then I taught a course very briefly at the 42nd Street commercial high school, where I taught scenario writing. That was the only thing I could think of in which I might conceivably have had any experience, because my father was a movie manager. Fortunately nobody showed up for the course, so I never had to teach it.

Q: Both of these instances illustrate the fact that in those days, for people with that political, social orientation, it was not unusual to teach a course, like you did in public speaking, which you had never taken and was just from personal experience.

BARBASH: But I was a public speaker and I was a college graduate. I was doing it.

Q: Nowadays people rarely get into such jobs without some training.

BARBASH: That's right, but I have to say about the W.P.A., I think that, contrary to all of the jokes that have been made about it, it was the life-saver for my generation.

Q: Oh, for so many people, yes.

BARBASH: We all went into it, and we learned very valuable lessons from it.

Q: In a sense, it had a similar effect to that in the post-World War II period under the G. I. Bill of Rights. How many people came out of it who would not have ever been writers and actors and many other professions.

BARBASH: Yes, that's right. The point I was making was that it wasn't the leaning-on-a-rake. . .

Q: . . reputation.

BARBASH: . . . because everybody was in the same boat. This was a country that was almost distraught. If capitalism was ever close to being at its end, this was it. This helped create some mood of hopefulness, and of course if you were young and in your 20s, I can't remember having a sense of desperation. We had something to eat and we had what was an interesting job. I look back on those days with great affection. I made most of my friends there.

Q: Then your next interest.

BARBASH: My serious work in the labor movement began with the contacts I made through the Workers Education Project, which was headed by Nelson Cruikshank, who was just a young minister who had had an assignment in New Haven and then made contact with the Workers Education Bureau when this project was set up.

Q: Workers Education Bureau of the AFL

BARBASH: That's right. And when this project was set up, it was set up in a famous landmark of New York City labor and radical activity, the Labor Temple, which had been headed by a well-known, famous American radical minister A.J. Muste. Muste allowed the Labor Temple to be used as a base. What we did was to go out and offer to run classes for the trade unions. A very valuable experience.

Q: What was the approximate date of this?

BARBASH: This was from 1933 onward under various auspices, first under the state and then under the Federal Government directed by somebody whom we all came to revere and love. Hilda Smith was the first national director and [it was] financed through the WPA projects.

Q: Because Hilda Smith is referred to by other people who have given this sort of interview I should say that is the "Jane" Smith most people refer to.

BARBASH: Yes.

Q: And because Nelson Cruikshank later became very much involved in international affairs, we should identify him as subsequently the AFL nominee to be head of the Marshall Plan Labor Office in Paris many years later. Yes, go ahead.

BARBASH: Well, Cruikshank and I and our respective families formed a life long friendship which continued into Washington. In fact, he called me from abroad once to take a job in Europe which I foolishly turned down.

Q: Not foolishly, because ultimately somebody else got it who. . .

BARBASH: Well, foolishly from my experience.

Q: Was that the job that Dave Saposs ultimately had?

BARBASH: I don't know what job he was going to offer me, but with a growing family, it seemed just not feasible for me to take it. This was, I think, when we were living in. . . I had just returned from Chicago working for the Meatcutters Union.

Q: Oh, this would have been around 1950.

BARBASH: 1949 and 1950, yes.

Q: Then it was after that. This was for one of the jobs in the O.E.E.C.?

BARBASH: Yes. I went from the . . . We were on a roller coaster at the WPA One time we were elevated to almost $37 per week, but it was immediately cut back to $15 per week,

but it was fun. We lived in the Village and were part of a coterie of people. We had great fun. Chuck Stewart was our neighbor in one of these.

Q: Stewart was later in the O.E.C.D.

BARBASH: Yes, and we were part of a whole circle, and later on Kitty got a job at the Laundry Workers' Local of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, where we gave Hy Bookbinder a job.

Q: I should interrupt here to say that the Kitty referred to is Jack's wife and they are just about to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary, which means this would have been shortly after. . .

BARBASH: This would have been in the early 1930s, yes. I got to know the Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union very well and in particular J.B.S. Hardman, who gave me a job in the Educational Department along with Agnes Douty, Agnes Martocci then, and Esther Peterson. We wrote correspondence courses in labor and also began a life long friendship with all of these people, particularly Hardman, who had a great influence on my intellectual development. I did a lot of writing for the Amalgamated. I wrote correspondence courses in American Labor History and in the economics of the laundry industry, and I also wrote for The Advance, the journal of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. It was one of the great labor newspapers and J.B.S. Hardman, whose real name was Jacob B. Salitsky, . . .

Q: He was a European radical.

BARBASH: A European radical who knew Lenin. He was a man born in the late or middle 1880s. It was a great, profound education. In fact, when I wrote my first book in 1948 called, Labor Unions in Action, I credited four people who had a very profound influence on my intellectual development: Fania Cohn, who was the Educational Director of the Ladies Garment Workers Union, with a long, long history going back to the early 1900s; J.B.S.

Hardman, the Editor and Educational Director; David Saposs and William Leiserson, whom I had met and worked with. In 1937 or 1938, I took the Federal Civil Service exam for economists and was picked off that list by David Saposs, the Chief Economist of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB).

Q: Before that you were working for the state?

BARBASH: Oh, I forgot that chapter. Yes.

Q: Luckily I know you, Jack.

BARBASH: I took a Civil Service examination for minimum wage research analysts.

Q: That was a state Civil Service [examination]?

BARBASH: That was a New York State [examination], yes. I should even go before that and say that I had very good education in labor at New York University, which boasted of an excellent faculty, then experimenting with the institutional approach to labor problems; that is, instead of looking at labor, as my friend Selig Perlman said, as “an abstract mass in the grip of an abstract force,” my teachers at N.Y.U. were all people who were caught up in the daily work of the unions as consultants, as arbitrators, as investigators, and I had people who made a very profound impact on me in the study of labor.

Q: Some names here would be good for people wanting to do research.

BARBASH: Well, among the names were Lois McDonald, who was a pioneer in organizing women workers in the South and made this connection with the Affiliated Schools group. I forget the complete name. Willard Atkins, who wrote a pioneering book with Paul Douglas in the early 1920s called, Labor Attitudes and Problems in which they studied labor problems industry by industry. It was Douglas, Atkins and Harold Lasswell, who became a distinguished social psychologist at Yale. Emmanuel Stein, who was writing factual briefs for labor arbitration cases. Carl Rauschenbush, who was part of a family of social

reformers. His father, Herbert Rauschenbush, was the founder of the social gospel in the ministry. He awakened the Christian ministry to the labor problem. His brother Paul was a pioneer in unemployment insurance in Wisconsin.

I ran into a whole coterie of people at N.Y.U. and I taught at N.Y.U. I became a graduate assistant teaching labor courses and then got a job with the New Deal agency, the Works Progress Administration (W.P.A.), where I wrote my first formal piece of work in 1935, a pamphlet which became widely used. Called Apprenticeship Admittance Requirements in New York City Trade Unions, it listed all of the unions which were offering apprenticeships. It gave me new insight into craft unions, so that by the time I was in my middle 20s. . . I also took a master's degree at N.Y.U. and decided to take as my master's thesis topic the Senate's on-going LaFollette Committee investigation. I was influenced in that by a boy friend of Agnes Martocci's, Eddie Levinson, who was the Labor Editor of the New York Post. Alone Eddie had constituted himself as the precursor of the LaFollette investigation, because he had written an epic work called I Break Strikes as a series of articles for the New York Post. The book turned out to be the life of a strike-breaker by the name of Pearl Bergoff. He always hated his feminine name. Pearl Bergoff was the preeminent tool of the open shop employer in breaking strikes from about 1910 on, if my dates [are correct]. Levinson's book was what opened up the whole question of systematic employer activities, and I decided to. . .

Q: Systematic employer anti-union activities, strike-breaking.

BARBASH: Yes. I wrote my dissertation on . . . I think it was called, “Employer Attitudes and Methods of the Belligerent Employer” using. . .

Q: This was your master's?

BARBASH: That was my master's thesis. I became so interested that I wrote 350 pages for a master's thesis. I remember Kitty sitting up all hours of the night typing it to meet the deadline, but it brought me in contact with the LaFollette Committee and I was present

at that famous moment in the LaFollette Committee hearings on the [1937] Chicago Memorial Day massacre when the Fox Movietone movie was shown [with] the strikers being shot in the back by the Republic Steel Police. That little clip from I think it was either Fox Movietone or Paramount News became one of the staples in exposing anti-unionism. I got to meet the staff of the LaFollette Committee. I was doing this through 1935 and 1936. In 1937 I finished the thesis.

Q: You wrote it while you were working?

BARBASH: I wrote my thesis while I was working, yes. I was also working and teaching at N.Y.U. As a teaching assistant I taught night courses in labor problems. Kitty and I were living in the Village at the time, so it was no great problem. This period was an exciting time in our lives, and even though the country was in a deep economic depression — Roosevelt had just come in — we didn't know . . . Looking back on it, it was the most gripping time in . . . (end of side A, tape one)

Q: This is the second side of the first tape of the interview of Jack Barbash. He is now going through the period of the mid- and late-1930s, and he has mentioned two things on which I want to ask him for some details. One of them is the LaFollette Committee. How it was brought about. What it was doing at this exciting period. Jack, you mentioned that you attended the meetings as part of your effort to do your master's thesis. Did you come down to Washington?

BARBASH: I came down to Washington, yes.

Q: We never met at that time though, as I recall. I don't remember.

BARBASH: No. Would you have been employed [in Washington] in 1935? I think it was somewhere in 1935.

Q: Oh, it was 1935.

BARBASH: No, this was 1937. Yes, of course.

Q: 1937. Yes, I was at the N.L.R.B. [National Labor Relations Board] the day that the Wagner Act was declared Constitutional on April 12, 1937.

BARBASH: I had been in touch with the LaFollette Committee before that.

Q: I see, so it was in the LaFollette Committee. You didn't visit us [at the N.L.R.B] or anything like that?

BARBASH: No. I knew Dave Saposs only casually. I didn't really get to know him very well.

Q: Well, we'll get to Saposs of course later, but what about the LaFollette Committee? Its origin, purpose, etc.?

BARBASH: Well, I believe, we are now talking about [events that occurred] close to sixty years [ago]. I believe what Eddie Levinson did on Pearl Bergoff in his book, I Break Strikes, of which I have an autographed copy, . . .

Q: The title of that book was a direct quote from Bergoff.

BARBASH: That's right. I reviewed the book. I forgot to say, but one of my other chores then was that I was a book reviewer for the Brooklyn Daily Eagle. It was an inspirational idea of a man by the name of Ed Cushing, who later turned out to be part of a Communist cell. One other person who was there who testified before the Un-American [Activities Committee] was Winston Daniels, who became a C.B.S. correspondent. But the Brooklyn Daily Eagle magazine, you know, . . . I had been a school boy correspondent at both Thomas Jefferson [High School] and N.Y.U., one of my odd jobs, covering sports. I covered college and high school sports for the New York Times . . . — My editor then became a famous columnist, Arthur Dailey, who when I needed to go to my high school prom, lent me five dollars to rent a tuxedo. — . . . and the Brooklyn Daily Eagle. I

continued as a stringer in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, and I wrote articles for them. I wrote an article on the C.I.O. for them. Jack Herling also did some writing for them through Ed Cushing. I did articles on other labor topics and earned a little money that way. I still have in my scrapbook the article on the C.I.O. and John L. Lewis, in which I made the point that this was more than an academic squabble over craft versus industrial union. It was just a whole new way of looking at things. I was doing lots of side things that were related to labor, but my serious, systematic work was my master's dissertation.

You were asking me about the LaFollette Committee. I wandered off. I believe it was Levinson's extraordinary work on the New York Post as Labor Editor, one of the early labor editors, and his investigative reporting of Pearl Bergoff that led to the LaFollette Committee investigation, because he opened up that whole new field brilliantly, brilliantly. I got to know Eddie through Agnes. Eddie was Agnes' boyfriend. So I knew about the LaFollette Committee almost from its very origins and followed it, then went to Washington several times to talk to the Committee with an eye perhaps to getting a job, but I never succeeded. Actually the first work I did for the LaFollette Committee was when I got a job at the N.L.R.B., when David Saposs took me off the Civil Service list, and somehow I got assigned, as they say now, seconded [from the N.L.R.B.] to the LaFollette Committee.

Q: Well, we'll get to the N.L.R.B. later.

BARBASH: Now, the origin of the LaFollette Committee itself has been written about, but Senator [Robert M.] LaFollette had quite a Communist problem on the Committee itself, and he became disillusioned with the Communists. There were articles written that he himself may have written about it in the Saturday Evening Post or some such place. My memory is very dim. I seem to think that there was a book written about it by a historian later on by the name of Margolin or Margolis, who wrote about the inside workings of the LaFollette Committee. Nevertheless, the LaFollette Committee did an invaluable job in setting the stage for the kind of anti-labor activities, giving content and depth to some of the language of the National Labor Relations Act, and, before that, Section 7A of the

National Industrial Recovery Act, which formed part of the link and legislative history through which the National Labor Relations Act was formed, and also the Railway Labor Act. All of these constitute part of an evolving legislative history [about] which my memory is too dim, but . . .

Q: Well, the Railway Labor Act, though, was passed even before the Democrats came in, wasn't it?

BARBASH: The Railway Labor Act came in 1927, and it did deal with some of these unfair labor practices on the railroads. The real author of the Railway Labor Act was a man who later became one of the co-heads of the National Industrial Recovery Administration, Donald Richberg. He was a labor lawyer very close to the railroads and to John L. Lewis, and was connected in the early 1920's to the passage of the Railway Labor Act. . The railroads were able to get the first protective legislation because the railway unions were in a unique position of being a highly organized, well-connected organization in rural areas, where they could reach rural communities. The authorship of the Railway Labor Act, I am trying to remember, was a combination of a populist Congressman. . .

Q: From the Midwest.

BARBASH: Yes, so you see the unique political position of the railway unions even before the Wagner Act gave them this as well as a pension act.

Q: Because of the strong organization of the railways, they had this precursor protection which the Wagner Act later on was able to pick little pieces of.

BARBASH: Yes, and there have been a series of distinguished books, which I have forgotten about... which I forget about now. What was her name?

Q: She worked for Professors Millis and Montgomery.

BARBASH: That's right, for Millis and Montgomery. And then there was a lawyer, whom we both knew who wrote a book on the origins of the NLRB, Joe what's his name?

Q: Oh, my lord. Yes, Joe his name began with an "R."

BARBASH: It was a Jewish name.

Q: Yes. [Later: Joseph Rosenfarb]

BARBASH: . . . who did a superb job in tracing the legislative history. And Eddie Levinson's book, just to bring the discussion up, is one strand in that legislative history which had been explored in a variety of ways. What's the name of that current Washington Post reporter?

Q: Svoboda?

BARBASH: No, the columnist who is on Washington Week in Review?

Q: Haynes Johnson?

BARBASH: Haynes Johnson. His father, Malcolm Johnson was a pioneer reporter.

Q: Oh, yes. He was a famous reporter.

BARBASH: Well, to get back [to the subject].

Q: We were talking about the LaFollette Committee.

BARBASH: The LaFollette Committee, despite the internal probings and the emphasis on the industrial unions and that kind of thing, nonetheless historically was a major force in the legislative history of the Wagner Act because the Wagner Act never spelled out its key terms. It never really spelled out "collective bargaining." In justifying it before the Supreme Court Saposs' Division [of Economic Research, NLRB] and you and others had to go

back into the legislative history of collective bargaining and those early [NLRB research] pamphlets were an attempt to spell out that history. . .

Q: Jack, you are referring to the early reports. I would love to take credit, but I didn't get to the NLRB until shortly after [that research helped establish the Act's Constitutionality].

BARBASH: A group of you, yes.

Q: Right, but that group under Saposs. . . We'll get into that when Saposs appoints you. There is one thing, because it's important later on, for students of this period, especially those who work in the international field must understand that in the LaFollette Committee, in the CIO, in the NLRB, and in other New Deal Government agencies, Communists were active. They were a force within these agencies, but at that juncture the Communist-anti-Communist conflict had not developed in such a way that these people were thrown out of their jobs; so that at the same time within agencies you could have the fight between the Communists and the anti-Communists, especially among us who were socialists and none of us would have thought that these guys should be kicked out. It was just their political influence that we were worried about.

BARBASH: Yes. The situation was simply this. The CIO erupted and you had what I guess you would call several “centers” that were prepared to function in it. You had the Communists, a well organized group. It was unavoidable that they would move in and that they would be utilized, because they had the organizational experience.

Q: . . . and would be useful. We have to say that.

BARBASH: You had the Socialist, non-Communist left developing from the Brookwood Labor College stream, who were a very important source of organizational skill. They proved invaluable in that they constituted a source of organizational skill in countering the political significance of the Communists. There are some who hold, I think with some exaggeration, that the Brookwood Labor College was the origin of the CIO, of the non-

Communist part of the CIO In any case, Phil Garman wrote a chapter in a book making this point, but the Brookwood Labor College certainly cannot be ignored as having provided a reservoir of skilled people who were schooled in labor organization. The Socialists were a part of that group. . .

Q: . . .and A.J.Muste and Dave Saposs, both of whom became important later on.

BARBASH: Yes, so you had a body of experience that was invaluable. This was also the Popular Front period in Communist labor development in the world wide scene, so the Communists did not seek to isolate themselves and sought alliances and there was common ground here, so that I think from the vantage point of the 1990s — from what we know of its later history and historiography — this whole matter of Communist influence has to be understood. I do not, however, want to diminish the importance of the Communist Party itself. There is enough documentation and folk experience, you might say, to indicate that the Communists functioned in the 1930s as an organized group to enhance the position of the Soviet Union within the labor movement.

Q: One of the complications here is the fact that during this friendship period of the mid-1930s before the attack of the Germans on the Soviet Union, during that period among those of us who were anti-Communists, we were challenged. These people agreed with us on so many [points], so that there is a complication there, which later on could not exist once Soviets. . .

BARBASH: Yes, the Socialists and the group around them were the only ones who saw the long term historical significance of this and made a particular point. It's interesting that some people who became, as you know, Communist hunters were themselves — the striking case was J.B. Matthews — hyper pro-Communists before they turned, but after the passage of time, I think lots of the fellow travelers were not, as I look back on it, the instruments of subversion that they were made out to be. They were young people caught up in the enthusiasms of the moment, and the Communists seemed to fit the romantic

stereotype. I take it as a source of my education in the Socialist movement that I myself and my friends were never really caught up in that. I have to say that although we saw it, I think it was mistaken. It was an overkill to deal with the Communists in the manner of [Texas Congressmen Martin] Dies [in the late 1930s] and [Senator Joseph] McCarthy in that way, but that is the subject of another thesis and has been actually. I think in short I would end up this part of it by saying that it may have been counterproductive, because it demonized the Soviet Union, demonized them not in the sense that they were better than they were being described, but demonized them to make them practically omnipotent and paralyzed the democratic forces into believing that this was a hopeless thing, whereas if you pick up a Marxist interpretation, the seeds which ultimately led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union were already to be seen there, and if we had had a more critical stance, which was not dominated by this implacable [overkill] . . . The overkill, I think, weakened the forces given the hindsight that we now have of history.

Q: Well, we were talking about your development in the labor field with the LaFollette Committee. You wrote your thesis and were working for the State [of New York] for a while.

BARBASH: And then I took a Civil Service examination.

Q: For Federal employment.

BARBASH: Federal employment and within a couple of months after the Civil Service examination, I got a call from Washington [asking] if I would be interested in a job as an economist for the National Labor Relations Board. I said, “Yes,” and they sent me down to take a physical examination, which I failed because of my eyesight. When I went to take it over, the examining physician said, “Why didn't you tell me that you had a job?” So he passed me.

Q: Well, you said that you were taken off the list which is literally true.

BARBASH: Yes. I think Saposs knew my name.

Q: But let us admit — and there were many cases like that —

BARBASH: I think Ben Haskel was in the same situation later on.

Q: . . . that when these lists came — by that time I was with the Board —

BARBASH: [The list was based on what was called an “unassembled examination,” that is you were rated on the basis of your education, experience, etc.

Q: . . . when the lists came, the list was reviewed by people to find out a couple of things. The pro-Communists influence was so strong — and I agree with you not all of these groups were committed Communists — but their influence was such among the legal staff — and it had its effect on cases at the margin between the AFL and the CIO — they were so powerful in the legal staff that Saposs, the Chief Economist of the Board, who did some brilliant analysis of the economic basis for the Act in connection with lead cases that came before the Supreme Court, Saposs felt that he had to have a staff that was reliably understanding of the political nature of some of the cases that came before us, and frankly he favored people. . . His interview of me was one that resulted from a recommendation made by friends of ours, Socialists, who were already on the staff, and, as I recall, he asked me only one question, “Are you related to the Bessie Weiss, who was my student, at Brookwood?” Well, that was it. You know Brookwood and that connection. . . And in your case, the list came down and well, I must say without looking too carefully when we saw a reliable party. . . I say “we” because this was circulated among the whole group of us before we gave the recommendation to Saposs, and he did know of you. I don't know how.

BARBASH: I think Kitty and I used to check in at Brookwood from time to time.

Q: Yes, as I did too, and my sister of course was a student there.

BARBASH: And I think I may have asked him to talk to my Socialist Party branch in Brooklyn.

Q: Right. In any event, it was a familiar name and that's how a few others came in with that sort of reputation. Some of them were not as good in the work of the N.L.R.B. as others, although, as you know, you were one of the popular ones, and I must say the functioning, the quality of the work that was done, was varied. In any event, you were at the N.L.R.B. for three years as I recall.

BARBASH: A year.

Q: Oh, that's right. 1939 to 1940 and then the division was abolished and some of . . . The accusation was made about the Communists in the NLRB and as it turned out the only one who was discriminated against was one who was an anti-Communist, Dave Saposs, who lost his job.

BARBASH: Yes, I went to the Office of Education.

Q: In late 1940, as I recall.

BARBASH: Yes.

Q: And stayed there until the war began.

BARBASH: Yes, and then I went to the W.P.B. [War Production Board] to work for Saposs.

Q: Yes, Saposs by that time had been rehired in the Government and was the head of a staff. . .

BARBASH: And I recruited Nat Weinberg and introduced him to the U.A.W. by the way.

Q: Oh, really.

BARBASH: Yes, I introduced him to Don Montgomery.

Q: So that you were working in the War Production Board. So your work at the NLRB and subsequently at the War Production Board was really in the domestic field?

BARBASH: Completely in the domestic field.

Q: However, you were exposed — and because of your political background I imagine kept in touch with the broader international field.

BARBASH: I knew social history in general, yes.

Q: Now, how did you become involved and interested in the international labor field?

BARBASH: Intellectually I became involved because I discovered very clearly in teaching that you couldn't teach or understand labor movements without understanding how other labor movements [function]; that is, the comparative method is absolutely indispensable in understanding your own movement and more so than in any other field that I have inquired into; that is the method of cultural anthropology by which you can't understand your own movement until you understand how it compares to other movements. It turns out to be an absolutely indispensable tool in teaching about our labor movement, although when I started teaching it, I was wrong-headed; that is to say, it was wrong headed in relying on essentially ideological differences between movements without picking up on the essential method of cultural anthropology which doesn't rely only on what people say but what people do. So when I wrote my first book, Labor Unions in Action, I was very conscious of the fact that this difference between revolutionary and pure and simple unionism was in large part based on what people say, not what people do. I admit that in the blush of my first discovery, I went overboard. I later came to modify this to say that what people say does also have a good deal to do with their behavior. That you have to understand that, but purely as a problem of understanding, as a teacher trying to communicate the idea of a labor movement, very early in my intellectual awareness it became quite obvious to me

that there is a difference therefore between knowing a subject and trying to communicate the subject. And I suspect that the great shortcoming of American labor leaders and the absence of ideology in American trade unionism was not that an ideology would have led to some difference in practical ends that might have been adopted, but that it did not contribute to an understanding of their own system. I found pure and simple trade unionists very good at running a union but very flawed in explaining the union to others, particularly to foreign trade unionists. That was the biggest failure, I discovered. I'll give you an example. The question of the trade union's relationship to capitalism. It became very clear to me that trade unionism is an institution of capitalism. It is an institution of capitalism because trade unionism subscript one exists only [as a consequence of the development of capitalism.] (End of side B, tape 1)

Q: This is Morris Weisz and we are now beginning the first side of the second tape of the interview with Jack Barbash. Well, Jack, you were talking about your developing interest in international affairs arising out of a combination of teaching experience, trade union experience, work experience, and how inevitable it was that if one were to understand thoroughly the American labor movement, some degree of comparative interest was necessary.

BARBASH: Yes, it's like cultural anthropology. You don't really develop deep insight into any [labor] movement unless you compare it with others. This is particularly true of the American labor movement which is a deviant labor movement in many respects. Because many practical people within the labor movement didn't understand that or misunderstood it, they created unnecessary friction within the international labor community. The friction arose out of [either] A) [the view] that American business unionism represents the one best way or [B)] the inability to see very common threads between the American labor movement and foreign labor movements due to the inability to conceptualize the labor movement. I don't mean conceptualization in any grand academic manner. I mean in a common sense manner.

I have a little anecdote about this. When we got a stream of Labor Attach#s here in Madison in the 1960s [studying at the University of Wisconsin], I thought that they ought to understand the American labor movement and so I gave them exercises in studying the American labor movement. When [Ben] Stephansky, who was apparently in charge of this work at one moment in the State Department heard about it, he blew his top. He wanted them to study foreign labor movements. Well, my observation was that the Labor Attach#s were mostly defective in understanding the American labor movement, not in any adversarial way, but in a sense to detect very fundamental, common features, the most [important] of which were [A)] that despite the ideology, movements were working within a capitalist order of different sorts and B) that ideology could be important. It imparted a style to the movements, which all you needed to do was reflect on, to see that there were significant differences in the style of the labor movement to which the foreign labor leaders paid a good deal of attention. Style, although they didn't think it was style, has been very important to them.

Q: Jack, there was also a misunderstanding on the other side, wasn't there? Namely the feeling of many of the foreign trade unionists — that is European we are speaking about now — a feeling that there is something wrong with the American trade unions. All they thought of was the big buck.

BARBASH: Absolutely.

Q: And Jack, one of the first things you did that we used so much in Europe — I never saw it published anywhere except in mimeographed form — was [a document in which] you tried to explain this called, “There's More to More than More.”

BARBASH: Yes, absolutely.

Q: What ever happened to that?

BARBASH: Well, it got incorporated into. . . I did it for the Ford Foundation.

Q: I thought you did it because we paid you to do it.

BARBASH: No, the Ford Foundation first commissioned it in the 1960s. They didn't think much of it, because I didn't denounce more in simplistic terms, but I am glad you remembered it, Murray, because it makes the point precisely that I want to make. Terrible confusion about money [existed] in both directions here. “More” in many instances is simply a method of measurement, not the substance of what you want out of a job. Many people in the quality of work movement both here and abroad took a very snobbish approach to the problem, seeing it solely in terms of money, when it was a much more profound phenomenon going to the heart of what union people demand and on which there wasn't all that much disagreement with management when you got to the core of it. Instead what you had were little hypocrisies about the importance of “more.” I don't want to go into the [details here but] I am glad that you remembered it.

Q: Yes, we are interested in this concept in the latter respect, not what you did for the Ford Foundation, because the movement for worker participation and all that looked down on this.

BARBASH: That's right. They did look down on it. When understood in its context, it was fully consistent with what they were doing and they were all not that much different once you got away from the ideology, but the ideology, I came to learn from my European experience, was very important and could not be ignored, even though analytically you could cut it away to the heart of the argument — that was for purposes of analysis — if you put it down, you see, because it analytically didn't make sense, that was a serious mistake. So what I learned and what I tried to impart to Americans dealing with foreign labor movements was to respect the ideology, because it represented a grand intellectual tradition — Swedes are again the classic case here — and imparted a quality of a movement to the analysis, instead of a business organization. The Swedes spoke

like economists analyzing the problem. To be sure, they could afford to do it because they were a majority movement, but also it was a style, an approach, which I admired very much, in their ability to see things whole, whereas a good deal of the cant, which American labor leaders delivered abroad about price control and other things, was pure cant. They did not represent an intellectually respectable analysis, because the truth of the matter, when you came right down to it, they knew better. The European experience led me to distinguish the quality of the labor movement. A movement is a movement, not only whether it was true or not. American trade unionists abroad were very poor representatives mostly, because they kept talking about the labor movement, but never gave it the underlying intellectual quality which you expect of people who participate in a movement. They only knew its history for purposes of debate. The labor movement did education; it did all of these things, a kind of a catechism, which they still bring up, which the President of the Steel Workers makes. When you hear an American labor leader abroad, who does not represent the movement, but can reflect on it intellectually. . . — not that he read a book, but that he had thought about it. That's why I liked Rudy Faupl. He did reflect some intellectuality to the labor movement.

Q: I have to interrupt you to say, because we don't know when people will be hearing this, that the Steel Workers Union head that you referred to is the new head, not Lynn Williams, who had that more intellectual perspective.

BARBASH: That's right and he was Canadian.

Q: And I have to also interrupt to say that the Rudy Faupl — because we have to give this footnote — the Rudy Faupl you referred to is the European-born, Hungarian-born as a matter of fact, trade union leader from here in Wisconsin, wasn't he?

BARBASH: Yes, he came from here. He was a machinist.

Q: . . . who was a member of the machinists and represented the AFL and AFL-CIO in international work for a long time. He had a wonderful rapport with [foreign] trade unionists.

BARBASH: It seemed to me on this ground that Walter Reuther was the classic industrial unionist. People put down Walter because of his verbosity and other things in the United States but it seems to me they failed to see the force of Reuther's intellectual leadership, even though it tended to get verbose and never always reflected itself in the quality of the movement that he led. He was not just a talker; he led a labor movement. You could see that in the demands [he made and] in the progress of demands. These were real industrial union demands. The whole conception and the vigor and the energy of the movement was very much like — and that's why they were kindred spirits — [that of] I.G. Metal in Germany, which would be the representative industrial union movement in Europe.

Q: Of course, his background, his father having come from Germany. . .

BARBASH: Yes, but a good deal of it came from native intelligence as he ran the union out of the thought of what it took to run a union in a modern industrial enterprise. The sources of his intellectual strength were the weaknesses in his dealings with fellow unionists, who always thought he was lecturing them. Well, he was, but he was the representative trade unionist in every respect who had the greatest rapport with the European trade unionists, because he represented their language. Well, there was more than words there. He suited the action to the words. The U.A.W. had the best staff work of any union for precisely that reason. The staffers were there not only to put in their footnotes and the most important contribution which Reuther made to the idea of a labor movement was that he related the needs of the movement to the needs of the society and the economy without giving anything away. That is, he was fulfilling the function of an industrial unionist in relation to public policy, and at the same time he didn't give away the immediate interests of the union. He raised the level of debate. He was really the only trade unionist who raised the modern questions, which educated me from my European experience. The book that I wrote, Trade Unions and Economic Policy, although I was naive about many things as I go

over the book, nevertheless, made the right point, namely that as a business unionist, you could still operate under capitalism, which is what I mean by “business unionism,” at the same time that you understood the relationship of your policy to the policy of the economy at large. Otto Pragen once had a word of wisdom about this. He said, “The American unionists speak in terms of program. European unionists speak in terms of policy.” These very phrases represent a profound difference.

Q: Otto Pragen was a former Austrian, who became very active in the American labor movement and was the Research Director of the Rubber Workers Union. Jack, you referred to the Swedes as offering you a good example of a movement, but you haven't said how you got to know about the Swedish labor movement.

BARBASH: I got to know about it, because I wanted to work up a project which would get me to Europe, so I worked up a project with the Manpower Administration headed by. . . Who was that fellow, you know?

Q: Wolfbein?

BARBASH: Not Wolfbein. He worked for Wolfbein. He had a kind of a sour face. Everybody knows him. He handed out the money.

Q: Yes. Okay, we'll think about it. Rosen?

BARBASH: Yes, Howard Rosen. But he was a very nice man.

Q: Very nice and very highly qualified.

BARBASH: Yes, beneath that sour exterior. So I worked up a project. .

Q: Put a date [on this]. This was the mid-1950s?

BARBASH: Late 1960's. The book came out in 1972. I think I did that in the late 1960s called, Trade Unions and National Economic Policy. It started out — my conception of it and you can see how doing it changed my approach — It started out as “trade union involvement in public policy.” I had it pitched only in terms of involvement, but when I actually got there I saw there was more than participation there. There were ranges of difference, ranging from the lobbying activities of the American trade union movement to the running of the government. Now, the Swedes occupy a special place, because I came naively to the Swedes, and although I was intellectually aware, I hadn't absorbed it.

Q: Let me raise a question about that. I would put it in my case earlier, because in the early 1950s, this brilliant man who both of us know, G#sta Rehn came to the United States with many of these ideas. Did you meet him at that time?

BARBASH: He reminded me that we had met actually for the first time in the United States when I started in the Industrial Union Department. He remembered me kindly and generously, because I had been very helpful to him in orienting him. I had no recollection of it.

Q: Well, the interesting thing is that this brilliant economist G#sta Rehn, whom I worked for later at the O.E.C.D., came to the United States with all these ideas and went back from the United States with the feeling that they were not communicating.

BARBASH: Yes, and that was his fault as well as our fault, mostly because we didn't have the bridge of language. For one thing, he lectured us and we got turned off. Precisely the same thing happened to me when I was there. They lectured me. For example, I came to Europe with the notion of apprenticeship that I had developed in doing that first pamphlet in 1935 on restriction of entry. When I put this to the equivalent of an LO [Swedish labor union] business agent he was outraged that I thought of it in such terms and sat me down and lectured me. I listened this time, or the shock effect penetrated into me. As I talked to the Swedish trade unionists, I couldn't at first fathom what they were saying, because

what they were saying was so radically different. Well, it took me several months and a year for this notion to sink in. Although I didn't think so [at the time], I was actually a victim of the American model and the verbiage, and in the 1960s, it took the Swedes to set me straight. When they did set me straight in the terms, then I proceeded to move ahead, and they thought so well of the book that they translated it into Swedish, because they saw that I caught what even they hadn't caught, because I was an outsider and was seeing this. Of course Meidner in particular corrected me, because in the first flush, I went overboard on it. I didn't see it.

Q: You mentioned Meidner. We should mention the fact that Meidner was the economist for the whole labor movement in Sweden.

BARBASH: Now that came at the beginning of the trip that I took.

Q: Let's mention the name of the book if somebody wants to read it.

BARBASH: It's called, Trade Unions and National Economic Policy.

Q: I think it's the first one in which you listed [your wife] Kitty [Barbash] as the joint author.

BARBASH: It may very well be, because she was joint author in a number of the things. But when I finally perfected the title, what I was really saying in that book — and never got around to saying it as effectively as I wanted to — was that the Perlman model was just one among many models of business unionism, as Perlman was willing to say about the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union but never extended it, but you could have the model of business unionism that operated at the level of the macro-economy as well as the micro-economy. What the CIO in a sense, but in full dress the European movements educated me into, was the participation of trade unionism into macro-economic policy without necessarily imperiling the business union function, and when they imperiled the business union function they were democratic enough movements to hear the reverberations from the rank and file. In the case of the Swedes and others,

but particularly in the case of the Swedes, when you had the rebellion of overcentralized bargaining the Swedes understood that they had to get back into the shop and to do something about the things that really bothered the people even in a country as small as Sweden where everybody knew everybody else. So you had this process and at the same time you had the trade union movement lecturing the employers that they were not sufficiently advanced technologically. I was puzzled by this until G#sta Rehn illuminated this for me by talking about the significance of a movement that is the majority, that if they played the game like a minority movement they were endangering the interests of their own members. The AFL-CIO could only reflect a minority and they were behaving in a business union model in which there was a minority here. This is why in the readings which I included I had the book by Rehn and Meidner, which I thought was a classic work, because it seemed to me the only trade union exposition of how a labor movement functions at a macro-economic level and lectures its fellow trade union movements on the responsibilities of macro-economic policy which they could only ignore at their peril.

Q: Well, what you are saying, as I understand it, is that competent as a union can be at a micro level, a [simple] combination of unions [cannot] do anything at the macro level unless it appreciates the need to operate at the macro level and requires it..

BARBASH: And then for many years, I made an enemy, half consciously, of Nat Goldfinger.

Q: Nat Goldfinger was the Research Director of the CIO originally and then the AFL-CIO later.

BARBASH: I wrote in the manuscript, which I let Nat read, which I thought would be a help to Nat, but I was wrong, that in a certain sense — I didn't say it as crudely as this, but this is what it amounted to and he saw through it — that AFL-CIO was not living up to its responsibilities as a movement in macro-economic policy, because its research functions were limited to a service agency to its unions, which was proper enough. Both the German

and the Swedish movements differentiated the research function as between the service function and the critical, objective, economic analysis function that they had to take on this other thing. Nat viewed it I think as a reflection on him, but in a certain sense it was saying that the research function is not being given sufficient importance. Actually the AFL-CIO recognized that itself by setting up that Mishel thing [the Economic Policy Institute]. That's what the Mishel thing is all about. As I once told Larry [Mishel], I am not egotistic enough to believe that my comment led to that, but that was what they were doing precisely.

Q: When you refer to "the Mishel thing," you mean an outside as it were economic analysis.

BARBASH: That's right. That you had to have, as I learned from almost every important trade union movement in Western Europe, the Austrian, the German, the Swedish. That you had to have and here I was playing my role of economist. Whatever the shortcomings of the economist were, they were taking a clear-eyed look at some of these things, breaking away from the cant that characterized most trade union descriptions. Even an economist trained in economic analysis . . . — Look at Nat Weinberg, who understood these things, or look at Rudy Oswald. — They were incapable until recently of understanding this. I mean they were spokesmen for a minority movement without the detachment to see that they had to be spokesmen for a minority movement.

Q: They were being paid. They were doing their job.

BARBASH: I am sure they were discharging their jobs, but they were trade unionists first and economists later. I was arguing from my Swedish/German [experience of Rehn and Meidner], who were the best economists. Here again, a casual observation awakened me to the importance of it. There is this leading economist of the Swedish who used to be a socialist. His name will come to me. He wrote a pamphlet for the American Economic Association, part of a series "Economics in Sweden." He singled out Meidner and Rehn as the leading economists of Sweden, if not of Europe, and even though they had this

trade union experience, it was that comment about those two that awakened me to the importance of what they were doing. I then read their book in a new light as a statement of a new philosophy. It took me some time to latch on to it. I give you this at length because this was not recognized intuitively either by the Labor Attach#s or by the American trade unionists who went abroad. They did not grasp it. They saw the European movements as deviant movements because of their macro view. . .

Q: Which they considered an ideological approach as against . . .

BARBASH: That's right. . . . in which their rank and file was being short-changed. Well, they may have been short-changed at the margin just as I think the American rank and file was being short-changed by this more than necessary pure and simple unionism, that is to say not meeting the people on their own terms, at least intellectually.

Q: But aren't these things reflections simply of the political situation. In the United States, they had no political power, so they tried to get everything out of their work.

BARBASH: Absolutely, but because there were some trade unionists who were capable of understanding, then it is not too great a demand to say that others [can]. For example, it is said about Lenin that this was the only way it could be done, but if you know the literature, you would know that there is a whole body of European socialism that condemned it. Rosa Luxemburg in particular — you can point to it — was not the only one. She and Trotsky and a less aberrant movement. Well, if a Walter Reuther is capable of understanding the problem, — what he was saying in his own fumbling, lecturing way that alienated some of the people and their inability to grasp the underlying truth of what he was saying — then others could have been capable and they didn't have the wit to see that they were just as ideologically set in the ways of 1886 as the Europeans were in their way. And they didn't have the wit to see that they could argue with the Europeans on their own turf. Look at the extraordinary performance which the Americans put on the shop floor in protection of interests which the European movements came to [acknowledge] only grudgingly and

then through the method of “dual unionism,” a system of unionism for the shop floor and a system of unionism for collective bargaining, which had its points.

Q: In different forms. You've actually jumped a little bit ahead of what I want to do. I want to get the basis of your involvement in international labor affairs. You've given it on the economic sense. Then just in the organizational sense, you became involved in various organizations, one of them was the US Government, where the Government sent you all over to lecture and observe. You did the lecturing for the Government and you did the observing for your writing.

BARBASH: That's right, as a matter of fact, I told the USIA that if I was going to do a next book I would dedicate to the USIA

Q: Really?

BARBASH#: Because they educated me in another sense by making it possible for me to go beyond the normal route. I got to talk to European trade unionists. I got to talk to European universities, which I would never have gotten into. Just the logistics of the problem of getting into trade union meetings and into universities was beyond what anybody could do. When I did the [book] Trade Unions and National Economic Policy, to have them arrange it for me. . . I mean all of these things were just. . . and on the whole except for few instances, they did it most graciously. They treated Kitty and me very generously wherever I went and I was extraordinarily grateful to them for providing me opportunities which I would [otherwise] never [have had] in a million years, because after all I was not a specialist in this area. The way it started was really a ruse by which I could go abroad and do some work there for the first time.

Q: It did bother us a little bit that on our first tour in Europe in the Marshall Plan, you never came over from 1952 to 1957. You only became interested later on.

BARBASH: That's right. I really was afraid of the whole problem, you see. I would be operating in a strange land and the kids were young. I had that problem. But I kicked myself for it. You are absolutely right. I kicked myself for not having taken advantage even of the Cruikshank offer. What a wonderful adventure that would have been if I had had sense enough, but I freely admit that I was really a country bumpkin in keeping away.

Q: Well, you made up for it later on. Mention, if you will, your involvement in the IIRA [International Industrial Relations Association].

BARBASH: Well, before that I should say chronologically that it was when I learned that the US . . . I guess the whole thing began with Harold Davey, who came to Madison as a student and then . . .

Q: I should mention that for a period of time the US Government , very intelligently, gave people as much as a year off to go to university in the labor field to study labor, and a large number of labor attach#s came to Madison [to the University of Wisconsin], partly because of our background in Madison. They went to other universities too. Harvard was one, but Madison was the one that gave them this exposure. Harold Davey having done this as you said appointed other people.

BARBASH: He appointed other people, but what he did for me was he bugged me to go out and lecture. I refused. I resisted. I haven't said anything about my Latin American experience, but that's another thing. He bugged me and finally when [my son] Fred got that thing in India, he [Harold Davey] knew that he had me, so he worked up a trip for a year in which he got the USIA to schedule me for Europe, the Indian subcontinent, and . . .

Q: And someplace in the Far East, and you went to Sri Lanka too.

BARBASH: Yes, and so I took a year off, or was it a semester. I forget. Fred was in India. Louis [Barbash] was already out of school.

Q: The three Barbash children are Louis the oldest, Fred now with the Washington Post, and . . .

BARBASH: And I went on this long lecture tour which began with you in India.

Q: I think you were somewhere else before. Turkey?

BARBASH: Turkey was part of this long trip. I think I must have covered about 15 or 20 countries. I went down the whole European continent. I was supposed to go to Iceland but didn't. I started in Sweden and went down to Cyprus and Malta. The thing was so poorly scheduled that I flew from Sweden to Malta in one trip, but the extraordinary opportunity that it provided for a variety of situations, a variety of labor [exposures]. Somewhere in my files there must be reports, because I wrote reports on the Labor Attach#s and all of that kind of thing. The various receptions that I got were just the most extraordinary experience that Kitty and I ever had in this respect. It was, now that I am retracing my steps, the same year that we ran the “Saposs thing” here. That must have been 1966. Yes?

Q: You came to India. We greeted you down in the south, you will remember, in Madras, and you were coming from Sri Lanka, I thought, or something.

BARBASH: Yes, I was coming from Sri Lanka, because we started, for some strange reason, . . It was due to the politics of the situation. We had to swing around and I think we started in Pakistan, and we couldn't fly [directly to India], so we had to go by way of Sri Lanka, then Ceylon. Q: And you came up then north from there to Madras.

BARBASH: It was several. . . But what happened was that we had the “Saposs thing.”

Q: The “Saposs thing” was Dave Saposs' 80th birthday, for which Jack prepared a publication of articles in honor of Saposs.

BARBASH: And we had a conference. (Pause)

Q: You were talking about this first big trip. You took leave from your job.

BARBASH: I am old enough, however, to forget things. Actually my first European exposure came with the Salzburg Seminar in American studies, which was an effort to expose Europeans to American studies and started I think in a way that Ed Young and Bill Rice were involved. I think they were among the first to see this empty castle, Schloss Leopoldskron, just across from Salzburg, as a possibility and set it up. It is now in close to its 50th year.

Q: Ed Young was a former Director of the Workers School and went all the way up from there — Ph.D. from Wisconsin — to become head of the University of Wisconsin.

BARBASH: I was invited there for a month and the USIA had an arrangement whereby they scheduled Americans at Salzburg, so I did lecturing in other places including Austria and Germany for the USIA

Q: That would have been when?

BARBASH: That was in 1962.

Q: And even long earlier than that you were in Latin America.

BARBASH: 1948. As a representative of the US Government, I was sent on a tour to work with Latin American labor departments in setting up cost of living studies, because I had done this work in the New York State Department of Labor, where I had constructed cost of living studies.

Q: I said I wanted you to comment on two large areas, one on the substance of international labor issues, the first of which ideology you commented on already. Do you have any comments to add about the ideological aspects, not only of the socialist unions in Europe especially, but of the Catholic unions?

BARBASH: Well, I have comments on that as it relates to the understanding of comparative movements by trade unions . . . (End of side A, tape two)

Q: This is tape two, side two. Will you continue, Jack.

BARBASH: It seemed to me that Foreign Service Officers were insufficiently exposed to the subtle nuances of ideology, because it is a “frame of mind.” The pragmatic American mind is not sensitive to the ideological overtones in which social policy and economic policy in countries other than the United States is the essence. The phrase “social policy” itself has all kinds of profound meaning. It is not a casual phrase as witness the debate that is going on now on the role of social policy in the new Europe. This is a very important element and it seems to me that the ear and sensibility of Foreign Service people is not sufficiently tuned to that level of discourse. It imparts a philosophic dimension which Americans just don't have, even where they don't ridicule it. But it is the nature of the culture and I think one misses a good deal. For example, this is the criticism which European economists have of American economists, that they are so immersed in the numbers and the technique and the methodology that they cannot see the social consequences. This is even true of the criticism which European employers make of American employers, because in response to your other questions, the chief difference between American management and sophisticated European management is that European management understands the functions and purposes of a union even where they disagree with it. They have a history by which they compare the rule of the labor force by the mob, by the crowd., by the street, which Americans don't have. So they see the purpose of the union as imparting a sense of structure to it.

This is why American companies, for example I.B.M., which are hostile to unionism in the United States, are able to capture the order which unionism imparts. You have told a few anecdotes about your experience with European management in searching out for an element that can render the workers from something like a disorderly mob, as they could conceivably be in some developed countries, into some structure. The labor force

has to be given structure and the union is a way of imparting structure. So European management is willing to sacrifice a few units of management prerogative in order to get some “class to class” discussion. They are able to see class in a constructive sense. If you have a class, you have to have spokesmen. This was very striking to me in the Swedish case. It is not that the Swedes are less diligent in protecting economic interests. It's that they see that industrial relations can frequently get out of hand if there isn't some structure to it and the union and collective bargaining is one way of structuring the work force.

Q: I am sure that you are entirely right. I would just stress one qualification, namely when I.B.M. goes abroad, there is that recognition that the United States doesn't have the unions as a class, whereas there they do, but also the situation in those countries is frequently one in which they couldn't operate otherwise, because in other countries they go and do the same thing [local companies do].

BARBASH: Okay, I am ready to admit that, but I must turn to the history of US industrial relations in the 1930s and 1940s, when it took a long time and a lot of strikes for modern American employers to accept collective bargaining and the National Labor Relations Act. You know how they struggled against the [National Labor Relations] Act. So it is some act of social intelligence for management to recognize when they had to come to terms and the Swedish movement illustrates that perfectly. That whole accord in 1936 — What was the name of that exotic place where they got together. It begins with an “S.” —

Q: I forgot. Where they got together for the first time.

BARBASH: That's right.

Q: But it was the beginning of the Socialist control of the government. (Pause)Yes, will you continue, Jack.

BARBASH: Well, I was talking about the differences between managements here and abroad. Ideology is important although not overriding and it seems to me that the

education of a Foreign Service Officer also has to consist, in part, in developing this ability to distinguish, to understand intellectual currents. The next remarks, you have to remember, come from somebody like me who has spent the last 60 or 70 percent of his life as a professor. If there is any shortcoming in the Foreign Service Officer which I have observed it is his/her difficulty in thinking at a conceptual rather than an out and out factual level. The facts are very important and are very useful, but it does seem to me, for example, that thinking at a conceptual level is also important, particularly at turning points in developments like now, for example. One has to be able to see tendencies, influences, which are very important. Of course the great seismic development has been the dismemberment of the Soviet Union and how this is affecting other things. It may be that [there are] bureaucratic constraints on the thinking of civil servants, not only Foreign Service Officers.

I have found the same problems with career civil servants in domestic agencies. The agency that I am most familiar with is the Labor Department. Here were able, competent people, highly adept in their field, but their competence and intelligence stopped short of being able to see the broader ramifications of what they were dealing with. Perhaps that comes from having rather rigorous responsibilities that you have to carry out regularly with no opportunity to think in grander terms.

On the other hand, I suppose professors liberated from the need to produce specified quantities are rather more generous in thinking conceptually. I am thinking now about the publications of agencies. I think in the labor field it is particularly important to deal conceptually with problems, because so much of the labor movement has an ideological undercurrent in which it is important to be able to be reasonably knowledgeable in philosophy, in ideological tendencies, in intellectual currents. I suppose this is less true now than it was say ten, fifteen, or maybe a quarter of a century ago. It does seem to me that trade unionism in the world is becoming more business like; perhaps this is due to the decline of radical socialist ideological influence in Western Europe. Marxism and the

other “isms,” my observation is, do not loom as large as they did when I first began those international trips. Perhaps this is less important.

Q: Well, let me draw you out on a couple of things and I'll try not to be defensive. I'm not in the Civil Service any more. Let us look back, and this applies more importantly in labor areas, but it applies to one of the other questions I want to raise with you and that is the training of labor attach#s. Two questions: One, remember 1933 and 1934 when the Labor Department put out a very subjective analysis of company unions under the direction of our friend Dave Saposs?

BARBASH: I remember it well.

Q: Can you imagine, today, Civil Servants, people who are not political appointees, being given that scope of authority without being canned immediately for coming to the sort of conclusions that came out of that Government publication saying that this [company unionism] is an evil thing, based on the research facts and something should be done about it? It is not possible today in the political atmosphere.

BARBASH: Well, I think it is a function of the times; that is to say, we were in a certain sense in a period of transition when lots of things were said and done and published that would be inconceivable now. Now if you did a study of company unionism, it would be too dangerously close to the discussion of labor-management cooperation, which is very much in vogue, and which are, if you want to think as grandly and conceptually as I have been advocating, what many of the leaders who are otherwise associated with progressive realms of thought — I am thinking of Kochan; I am thinking of Dick Freeman and others — They are talking about a new company unionism. You mentioned to me the President of the American Economic Association, who in 1932 talked about company unionism really being the answer. We are witnessing a reversion to that tendency, if you want to look at it in that way. The analogy is very close. The 1920s was a period of the doldrums for real unionism of the kind we knew and our friend was reflecting that. We are

witnessing the same doldrums and the same solution. The only difference between then and now is that the radical option is virtually not heard anymore. All we are hearing is the new company unionism, and “company unionism” is not too harsh a term to apply to this mode of thinking. You might think of what would be said if somebody called this “the new company unionism,” which in fact Schlossberg almost did at the Quebec meeting, you will remember, when Kochan and Bob. . . , the fellow from the University of Chicago, said that.

Q: Well, there was Katz and somebody else.

BARBASH: So I think it is a function of the times, Murray.

Q: That is true, but in order to guide us for the future, does that mean that we have to rely upon only the political appointees to bring in these new imaginative proposals?

BARBASH: It takes all kinds of people to make a world. I think good academics serve this purpose. Interaction with academics. Now I can't say that in point of fact my observation has been that the interaction with academics between say government and unions is higher in the United States than in most countries of comparable development that I have seen. Most professors in universities with very few exceptions are strangers to industrial relations. Most of them will come into it as lawyers. They will not come into it in the course of their academic work.

Q: I was going to point you to a comment with respect to the changes in our approaches necessary for the new situation in Eastern Europe on labor issues. Do you have any comments on this? For instance obviously we couldn't have a Marshall Plan for Eastern Europe, but what sort of help or participation or communication and exchange would be desirable in the labor field?

BARBASH: Well, I am not sure about that, Murray, because I had the same feeling in Yugoslavia when I spoke there about two or three years ago. The question they came up with was: What kind of trade union organization should they have in Yugoslavia? I

resolutely refused to answer the question, because it seemed to me the situation was in such transition that I could only do harm by posing as a person of authority on the subject. Instead, I think the basic problem is that the transition from socialism to capitalism as it is called is so much “up in the air” that we really have to study the signs [and] understand the nature of what's happening.

Let's take in point the great debate in the socialist countries of the shock treatment versus incrementalism in their economic policy. On one of the PBS programs, Stephen Cohen, this fellow from Princeton, who wrote a biography of Bukharin, assailed in the harshest terms the influence of the American economists, particularly the fellow from Harvard, Sachs, on pushing through capitalist market structures and held him accountable for the uprising. Well, what is the answer? What kind of model does one propose? I think there has to be thinking about it. The question has to be posed, so people are sensitive, but clearly we have no model. The only model we have is the Marxist model of the transition from capitalism to socialism, and of course that was disastrous and repudiated. There may be people in the State Department and elsewhere who are thinking about that, but I don't read about it the papers. Of course, at this stage of my life, I can't claim to be current with the literature, but do you see much discussion of the broader implications of the transition?

Q: Well, the answer is yes.

BARBASH: There is a discussion?

Q: There is discussion and the new Foreign Service Institute, renamed — with a beautiful campus now — the National Foreign Affairs Training Center, has been doing a whole lot of that I am happy to say, but let me say, I don't see it translated — not yet — into proposals.

BARBASH: Well, I would say. . .

Q: Let me just continue and say that the problem in the Cohen-Sachs disagreement you raised is the problem between the person who is an expert in a particular country and the

person who is an expert in a particular subject. Cohen is a famous Soviet expert. Sachs is a good economist. Whether you agree with everything or not, he's an economist about development, and these two things are passing in the night. The problem is how do you manage. . .

BARBASH: You may be right, but this is a level of discussion which belongs not in the training institute. If you are going to encourage your Foreign Service Officers to be sensitive, then they have to learn to look at the nuances in the signals that are appearing. It's this kind of conceptual thinking that I referred to earlier, that when you sit down for a briefing with an economic officer or anybody else, they were very good on the facts — and I don't want to discount how helpful that was to somebody who comes in raw into a situation — but it does seem as if part of the training should go beyond facts into sophisticated analysis of the facts. And as you say, somebody has to listen on the other end of the reports to make it worthwhile.

Q: Just for your interest, let me send you some of these discussions which do include Foreign Service people. I don't see them translated into action, yet largely because they haven't been tested.

BARBASH: Well, you have to rummage around. I think the deeper thing that I am talking about here is that the day-to-day technical requirements of the job can be so demanding that the broader issues of how to interpret the facts are neglected. I have read lots of annual reports — That's the first thing that I used to read when I got into a country. — and they were very important recitals. In only a few instances did you get — What I think you were trying to do in your training sessions. — get them to think conceptually and it is a problem of bureaucracy. It is not just that thing alone. You've got the bureaucratic tendency. . .

Q: How do you identify a person who is a prospective thinker, analyzer, and weigher of subjective factors. How do you run a company like the State Department and try to identify that quality among people?

BARBASH: Very difficult.

Q: Everybody takes the Foreign Service exam and you get the brightest people from the universities, and yet, as you point out and my observation would uphold, possibly to a lesser degree because I could identify people who are better at that, what do you put into your selection process to get that quality?

BARBASH: I don't know. All I can tell you is that it is very difficult. In a memo that was passed around in the Department of Economics [at the University of Wisconsin], Lee Hansen bemoaned the worthlessness of the paper which the prospective [Ph.D.] candidate reads as an indicator of his ability to teach.

Q: Lee Hansen is one of the thinking professors of economics that we have had here [at the University of Wisconsin].

BARBASH: If here you spend a day with a guy and you hear him do his best from his dissertation and the batting average of not giving them tenure is more than half, we are failures at predicting the performance of half the people.

Q: But you are not examining only with respect to whether they are good teachers. You are examining also with respect to whether . . .

BARBASH: Research performance, but you know you have a vita; you've got letters of recommendation. It's a very difficult thing. You try for it. The first thing is to be conscious of wanting it, so that you experiment with it. Generally if you know your field, I think talking with a person will indicate [his/her potential]. Examples of some of his college papers might do that. Casual discussion might do that. But I am not sure how you identify it. But at

least you have to try to deal with it in positions of this sort [labor attach#s] where you are asking people to be social commentators in the labor movement, and that's why I'm sure you are singling them out for special training, because you have to bring to bear a different order of judgment than when you are seeking other qualities.

Q: On some specific subjects, any views you have on the current industrial relations picture abroad and our picture and what should be known about it that might not have been known otherwise years ago? What new developments in the industrial relations field? You have commented on some of that already.

BARBASH: Well, roughly the tendencies are that most of Western Europe and most of the world seem to have played down the importance of socialism and socialist systems. In the fields that I know about, we are turning from socialism to economics. I think economic analysis becomes very important, rather more analytical than even I who claim to be a professional economist have been trained in. That is I think formal economic analysis, not to the idiot extremes to which it [has been taken] . . .

Q: Number crunching.

BARBASH: . . . in number crunching. But I would say that anybody who wants to be a labor attach# should have had more than an elementary course in economics. He should have had some intermediate [courses] and be able to think [in economic terms]. Here I would take as a model the Scandinavians, who can deal with formal economics in an intelligent way without becoming number crunchers. I noticed by the way in an article in the [Washington] Post they single out Laura Tyson. That she is doing that very well. I know, just to give you practical implications of that, that throughout his life as Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors, Walter Heller was bedeviled by the formalists in the economic profession, and that he had a real inferiority complex. I would have put forth Walter for a Nobel Prize, because more than anybody else, he gave meaning to the application of economic analysis to economic policy. But both sides of this balance have to

be maintained. You have to have a competent level of economic analysis here, which I do not find often, and I admit that as a defect in my own ability to absorb what's happening.

Q: But that is looked down upon by the current big shots in economic analysis.

BARBASH: What's looked down at?

Q: The qualities that Walter [Heller] had. He was almost a politician. They say it as if it's a dirty word. He was almost a "politician" rather than an economist, whereas the trick is to marry the two.

BARBASH: That's the point. I think that he successfully married the two, but the people who manifested the low respect for Heller were not themselves at the very top. They were people who were trying very hard to keep up with the "guild." My paper that I wrote about the "guild" in "Challenge" is very much in point. I do believe that formal economic analysis does give analytical skills to people which they otherwise might not have, but not to the point where economic theory is carried on as a branch of mathematics. I think the Europeans who criticize the Americans. . . This is why American economics is in the lead in formal economic analysis, but European economists think that we have gone too far in formal economic analysis even though they give us all the Nobel prizes.

Q: Well, who gives the Nobel prizes?

BARBASH: The Swedes.

Q: That's the point. The Swedes give that and therefore. . .

BARBASH: But the same Swedes. . . If you look at the economics journals in the Scandinavian countries particularly Sweden, which they have the good sense to print in English, you'll see that there is absolutely nothing like the American journals. The Americans, in order to have a journal accessible to people who understand English in the United States, have had to create a separate journal called, "The Journal of

Economic Perspectives." Only the British persist in the formal economic analysis that we do and they're equally unintelligible. Although the Swedes award the Nobel Prizes to the Americans for highly abstract contributions like proving the law of supply and demand, all the Swedish journals and the German journals that are published in English, [discuss] very practical affairs at a considerable level of sophistication. They don't go in for pure economics for pure economic sake. And it is at that level, I think, that even the economic analysts, who I am usually briefed by in the Embassies, could stand improvement.

Q: Jack, any comments leading from that to the issue — and how to face it and how to analyze it - of trade unionism as a challenge to the economy or vice versa, the dangers presented by economic policy to trade unionism and how those can lead to an intelligent public policy.

BARBASH: That's a big one. I've thought about it. We are in a stage where labor movements are on the defensive. [It has been a] very long stage. I see no sign of change. I may be like that American Economic Review President. Tomorrow something will happen. Everywhere, not only in the United States, but everywhere even where the union membership figures don't. . .

Q: Excuse me. Both of us have been trying to get the name of that guy. Was it Barnett or something like that?

BARBASH: It was George Barnett. . Q: Barnett. Right. He was the Head of the American Economic Association in 1932, who predicted the demise of the trade union movement. Barnett. That's it. Okay, go ahead.

BARBASH: Joel Seidman's major professor. I verified it. . . . and they are playing a defensive game everywhere in the world. The powerful labor movements are everywhere on the defensive against market forces, and it reflects itself politically by the absence of

the socialist [influence]. Let's take the established movements in Western Europe. And again Sweden is the case in point. I think it is just the fact that has to be recognized.

Q: Any new way that you can see of posing this problem? For instance, when a socialist or pro-labor government gets into power, it immediately has the embarrassment of having to face the trade unions and having to tell them that "we can't give you what you want." And then there's a change in the government. Now that's particularly important in these countries like Poland, Hungary, etc., where the great revolution takes place and the people who have office then lose office, because they can't give the people anything.

BARBASH: Yes. Well, it was like I was framing that response to Maurice Seidland, that he had only taken one variable into account. I don't know how you explain it, but that's the situation. Here again there are two ways of dealing with it. You deal with it when you look at what is supposed to be the successful experience of the four tigers. The secret of their success is their ability to restrain forces which oppose economic development, and that means the working classes. That's the secret of their success. The market is maintained only at the cost of restraining the labor movement to the extent that it exists and the forces by government intervention in the economy. Singapore.

Q: Singapore is an example and a threat to democracy, because these governments are not democratic.

BARBASH: That's right. I think it is a matter of skill and how you deal with it. But I do not know how you will escape that fact. The same thing is true in Western Europe. Now there might be an object lesson in what is taking place in Russia and [other Eastern European] countries. B may be superior to A, A being socialism, B being capitalism, and there is no difficulty in proving that as an abstract proposition, but the road from A to B can be very costly indeed and in Eastern Europe the costs associated with the transition at this very moment threaten the objective, and this gives some validity to Stephen Cohen['s argument]. It gives it some justification that the economists who are constitutionally

incapable of seeing the social consequences of going from A to B may be [serving us up] a gamble, a reversion to authoritarian, totalitarian forces who want to subsidize. How long can you keep people living at the standard of living which is necessary to refrain from giving subsidies to these inefficient industries that are running rampant and that seem to be problem. I don't know what the answer to that problem is, but it is a serious problem.

Q: Well, one answer is indicated in today's newspaper, where the World Bank is said to be thinking of large scale investments that will enable them temporarily to breach the gap.

BARBASH: And Boris Yeltsin's compromises, two steps forward and one step backward; but on the other hand, there are some indications that Poland has. . . From what we know, is there a less oppressive way of going from A to B? I think that is the dominant question for the Socialist systems. For Western Europe, I don't think you have [to worry]. You have a cycle of power.

Q: A cycle of power within the democratic system.

BARBASH: That's right. Democracy is not threatened by these things, and I think that the “welfare state” was overreaching itself in the Scandinavian countries.

Q: But they had the internal ability to correct themselves; the conservatives came into power and then they found out that they could not solve these problems, so they go out. But it is the nature of a democratic society that permits such changes..

BARBASH: There is a very harsh reality which was illuminated by my friend David Granik, now dead.

Q: Oh, Granik died. I didn't know that. He was a Russian expert here in the Economics Department.

BARBASH: He was a Russian expert, but he was a Russian expert who went into the factory and management. He concluded that the vulnerable aspect of the Soviet system

was the right to work, not the right to work in our sense, but the right to a guaranteed job. There are two elements involved in this situation, and that's why Kochan and others are utopians. For most of the jobs around, the system could only work if people have a long run or short run fear of being unemployed. That is, the jobs are so hateful in and of themselves that the kind of work which the system demands can only be carried on by people who are not guaranteed their jobs. As soon as you make the disincentives too weak, as soon as the people don't care how hard they work in the Russian factories, [the system ceases to function efficiently]. He studied this. This is not abstract reasoning. I feared that this was the case, but people left to their own devices [lack incentive]. This is why I say that the cards of the system are stacked against the kind of volunteerism which the human relations school [assumes] and, if you want case number one, [it] is I.B.M., which went in for that, and they still maintain that they guarantee the right to a job.

Q: While they are firing 20 percent of their people.

BARBASH: I think the welfare state regimes of Scandinavia and Europe were on the right track. They did it gradually, and understandably they overreached themselves, and now they are correcting it. But if you are in a system as extreme in the right to work [as the Soviet system] that made for incredible inefficiency. In the steel mills these guys would go in from the West and look at those clanking chains around the place and there's nothing that they can recover there, and they have to get rid of three-fourths of the labor force. The system just can't stand that kind of imbalance.

Q: Did Granik ever see what happened? When did he die?

BARBASH: About two years ago, Kitty?

Kitty BARBASH: Oh, I think more than that.

Q: So he didn't see the revolution in the Soviet Union.

BARBASH: No. I actually didn't read the whole book. I read a review of the book, but this is how he analyzed it and. . . (End of Side B, Tape Two)

End of interview